GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND BILL.

GOVERNMENT PROPOSAL.

RETURN to an Order of the Honourable The House of Commons, dated 9 March 1914;—*for*,

RETURN "showing GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS in connection with the GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND BILL."

(*The Prime Minister.*)

Ordered, by The House of Commons, *to be Printed*, 9 *March* 1914.

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Government of Ireland Bill.

GOVERNMENT PROPOSAL.

The essence of the Government proposal is that any county in the province of Ulster is to be excluded from the operation of the Bill for a certain period if, on a poll being taken of the parliamentary electors in the county before the Bill comes into operation, a majority vote in favour of exclusion.

It will probably be found most convenient for the purpose of the poll to take the parliamentary rather than the municipal boundaries, but it is proposed that Belfast, and Londonderry, the two county boroughs, should be treated as separate counties.

The poll will be taken for the county as a whole, without regard to the parliamentary divisions.

The persons entitled to vote at the poll will be those who are entitled to vote at parliamentary elections.

A poll will only be taken in a county if a requisition is presented to the Lord Lieutenant signed by a substantial body of electors of the county, say one-tenth, and it is proposed that the requisition for the poll must be presented within three months after the date of the passing of the Bill, so as to leave ample time for the taking of the poll before the Bill comes into operation.

The question will be put in something like the following form :—

EXCLUSION PROPOSAL. COUNTY OF

Are you in favour of the exclusion of the county from the Government of Ireland Act, 1914, for a period of six years?

Are you against the exclusion of the county from the Government of Ireland Act, 1914, for a period of six years?

The poll will be taken by ballot in the same manner, as far as possible, as the poll at a parliamentary election; and the parliamentary election machinery (including the Corrupt Practices Acts) will be adapted by Order in Council for the purpose.

If on the poll a majority in any county vote in favour of exclusion, the county will become automatically excluded from the operation of Home Rule for a period of six years. The period of years will date, not from the time of the poll, but from the day of the first meeting of the Irish Parliament.

The exclusion of any county will of course involve, during the period of exclusion, certain modifications of the mode in which the Bill is to operate as a whole during that period.

For instance, an excluded county must be placed outside the legislative authority of the Irish Parliament and outside the executive authority of the Irish Government; and it may also prove necessary to make some new arrangements for the mode in which the authority of the Imperial executive is to be exercised in any excluded area.

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The exclusion of any county will also involve consequential alterations of the representation of Ireland in the Irish Senate and the Irish House of Commons, and also of the representation of Ireland in the United Kingdom House of Commons.

It is proposed that the representation in the United Kingdom House of Commons of any excluded county should remain as at present, subject of course to any general measure for the redistribution of seats in that House.

Certain financial adjustments will also be requisite. It will not, however, be necessary to make separate calculations either of the revenue or of the expenditure of any excluded county, as the adjustments can be on some fixed basis.

In order to give full effect to the proposal, it will be necessary to add as an additional and separate part of the Bill clauses providing in the first place for the taking of a poll in a county, and for the exclusion of the county from the Bill if a majority are in favour of exclusion; and in the next place, enabling any provisions to be made by Order in Council which may be found necessary for the purpose of meeting the administrative and financial exigencies to which attention has been directed and for dealing with any other points of detail which may arise.

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